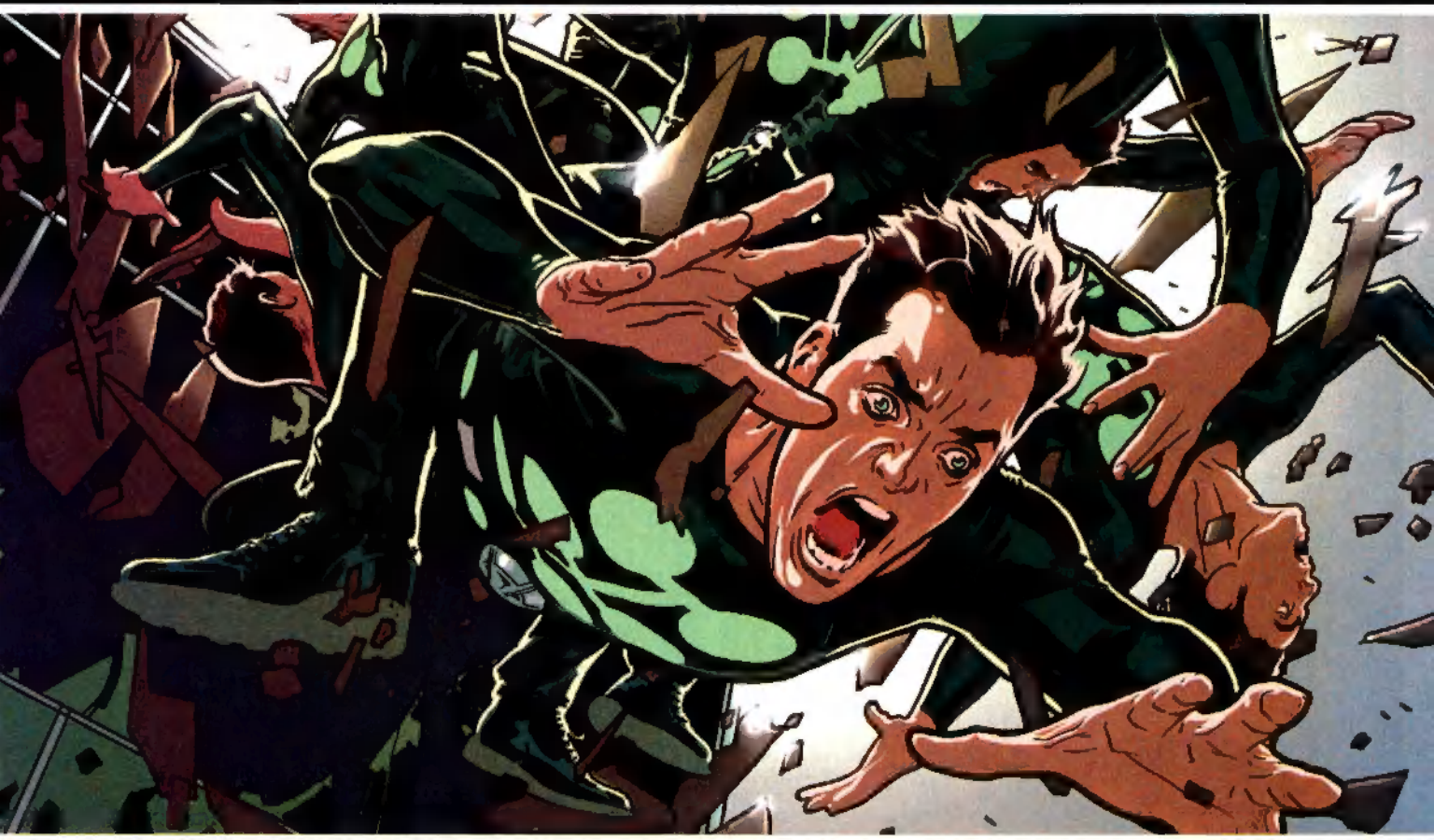
IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

X-FACTOR



THE DECIMATION--THE MOST CATACLYSMIC EVENT EVER TO OCCUR IN MUTANT HISTORY--HAS STRIPPED ALL BUT 198 KNOWN MUTANTS OF THEIR POWERS. MANY OF THE NON-POWERED MUTANTS HAVE FOUND SAFE HAVEN IN MUTANT TOWN. THERE, X-FACTOR SERVES AS THEIR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST A WORLD THAT MIGHT WANT TO ATTACK AND DESTROY THE FORMER MUTANTS BEFORE CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE AND THEY REGAIN THEIR POWERS.

NATURALLY MUTANT TOWN RESIDENTS WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH BEHIND THE DECIMATION. X-FACTOR HAS BEEN INVESTIGATING, AND, SO FAR, HAS GOTTEN NOWHERE. JAMIE MADROX SENT A DUPE TO MEET WITH DAMIAN TRYP, HEAD OF SINGULARITY INVESTIGATIONS. MADROX REJECTED BOTH TRYP'S OFFER TO BUY X-FACTOR, AND TRYP'S SUGGESTION THAT MADROX WAS BEING LIED TO BY THE X-MEN (WHO HAVE CLAIMED THEY HAVE NO INSIDE KNOWLEDGE OF THE DECIMATION.) TRYP, IN TURN, REJECTED MADROX'S THREATS BY CHUCKING MADROX'S DUPE OUT A WINDOW...BUT NOT BEFORE MADROX MANAGED TO GET SOME TISSUE SAMPLES OF BOTH TRYP AND HIS SON TO TRY AND DETERMINE THE MYSTERIOUS TRYP'S TRUE NATURE.

A DOUR SCOTT "CYCLOPS" SUMMERS HAS INFORMED SIRYN THAT HER FATHER, BANSHEE, WAS KILLED IN ACTION. SIRYN REMAINS IN DENIAL OF HER FATHER'S DEATH, AND HAS BECOME SUSPICIOUS OF CYCLOPS FOR HER OWN REASONS.

ELSEWHERE, QUICKSILVER--THE ACTUAL ARCHITECT OF THE DECIMATION--HAS ABSORBED THE PROPERTIES FROM THE INHUMAN'S TERRIGEN MISTS AND CAN NOW RE-EMPOWER MUTANTS WITH HIS TOUCH ALONE...EXCEPT SUCH RE-EMPOWERMENTS ARE SHORT-LIVED AND TEND TO GO HORRIBLY WRONG. HIS CURRENT WHEREABOUTS ARE UNKNOWN.

OH, AND ARIEL DAVID'S HIGH SCHOOL BOWLING TEAM FINISHED FIRST PLACE IN ITS DIVISION. SHE GOT A MEDAL AND EVERYTHING. WHICH HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ANY OF THE ABOVE, BUT PETER WANTS TO MAKE SURE EVERY MONTH WE HAVE UPDATES ON WHAT HIS DAUGHTERS ARE UP TO.

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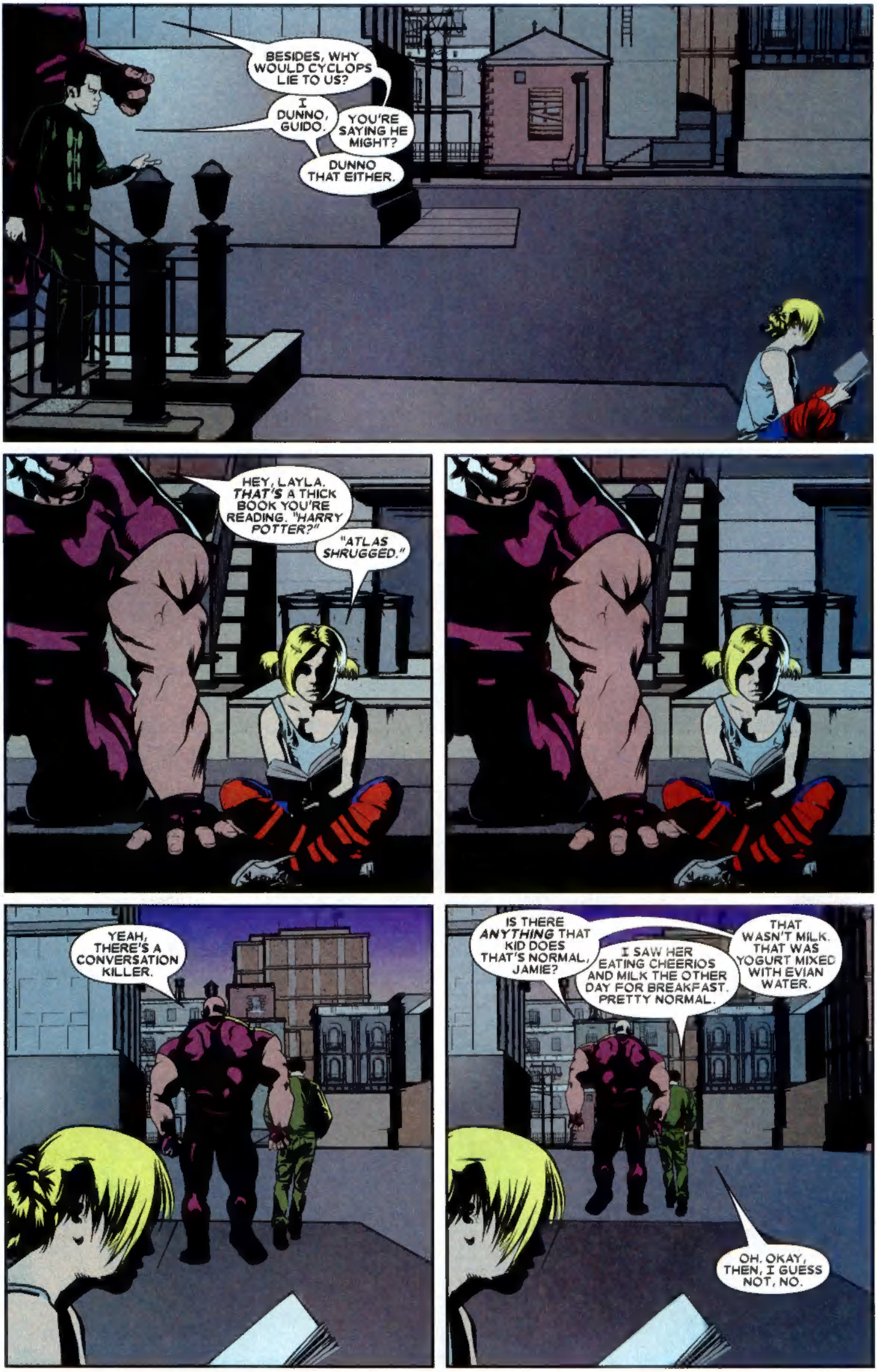
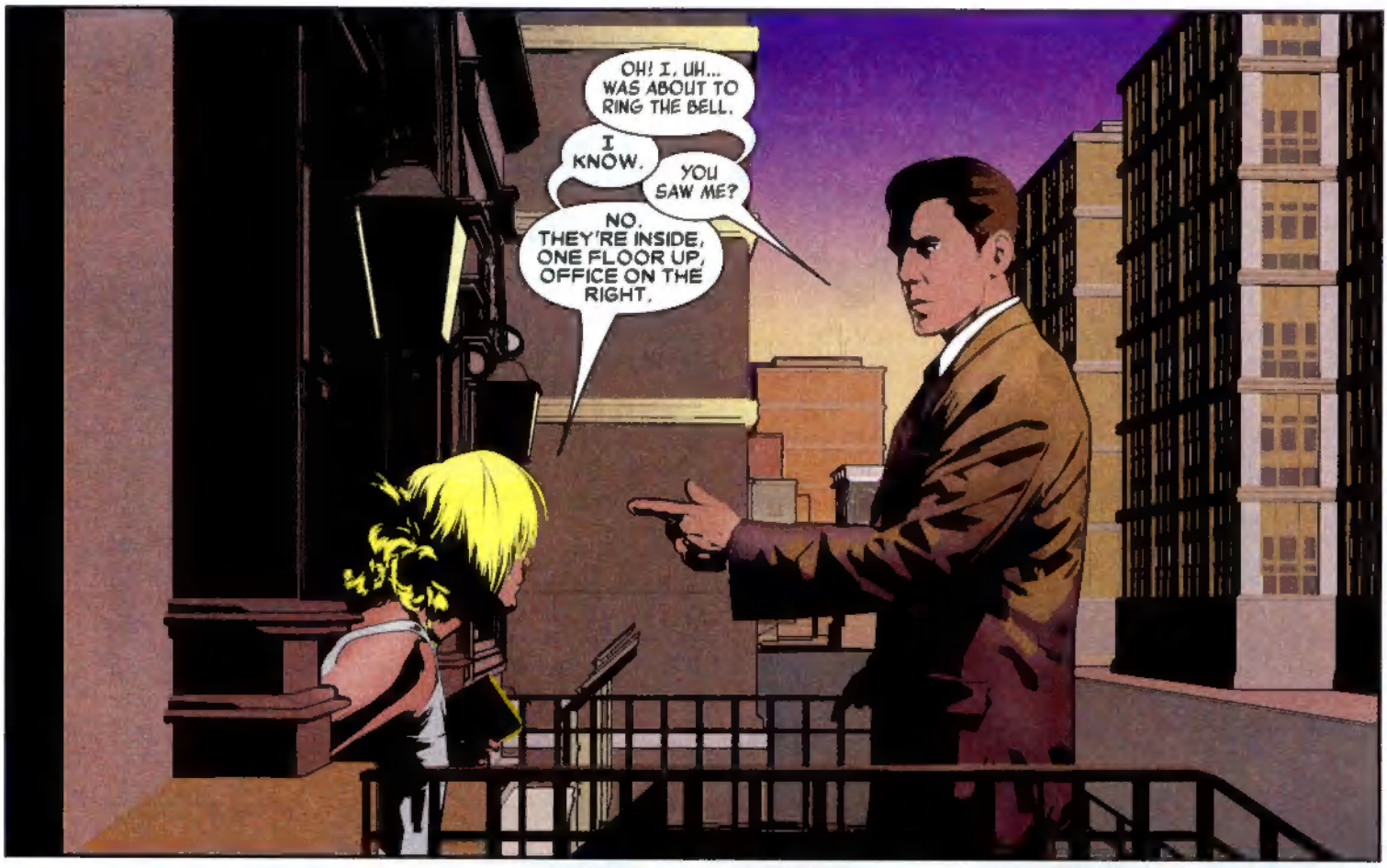
SO THE X-MEN THINK QUICKSILVER MIGHT SHOW UP IN MUTANT TOWN?
THAT'S WHAT CYCLOPS SAID, SIRYN. HE ALSO SAID PIETRO'S SO DANGEROUS THAT IF WE SEE HIM, WE SHOULD CALL IN THE X-MEN AND LET THEM HANDLE IT.
TOSS
Y'SURE WE'RE TALKING 'BOUT THE SAME SPEEDFEET, JAMIE? I MEAN...
WAK
...BACK IN THE DAY, HE WASN'T MY FAVORITE GUY, BUT "DANGEROUS?"
OW!
?
HE THREW IT.
HARD TO SWALLOW, IS ALL I'M SAYING. MEBBE HE'S BEIN' RAIL-ROADED.
AW, COME ON, GUIDO, LET'S NOT SING SAD SONGS ABOUT THE GUY. IN THE OLD DAYS, YOU WANTED TO TAKE A SWING AT HIM NOW AND THEN AS MUCH AS I DID.


BESIDES, WHY WOULD CYCLOPS LIE TO US?
I DUNNO, GUIDO.
YOU'RE SAYING HE MIGHT?
DUNNO THAT EITHER.
HEY, LAYLA. THAT'S A THICK BOOK YOU'RE READING. "HARRY POTTER?"
"ATLAS SHRUGGED."
YEAH, THERE'S A CONVERSATION KILLER.
IS THERE ANYTHING THAT KID DOES THAT'S NORMAL, JAMIE?
I SAW HER EATING CHEERIOS AND MILK THE OTHER DAY FOR BREAKFAST. PRETTY NORMAL.
THAT WASN'T MILK. THAT WAS YOGURT MIXED WITH EVIAN WATER.
OH. OKAY, THEN, I GUESS NOT, NO.

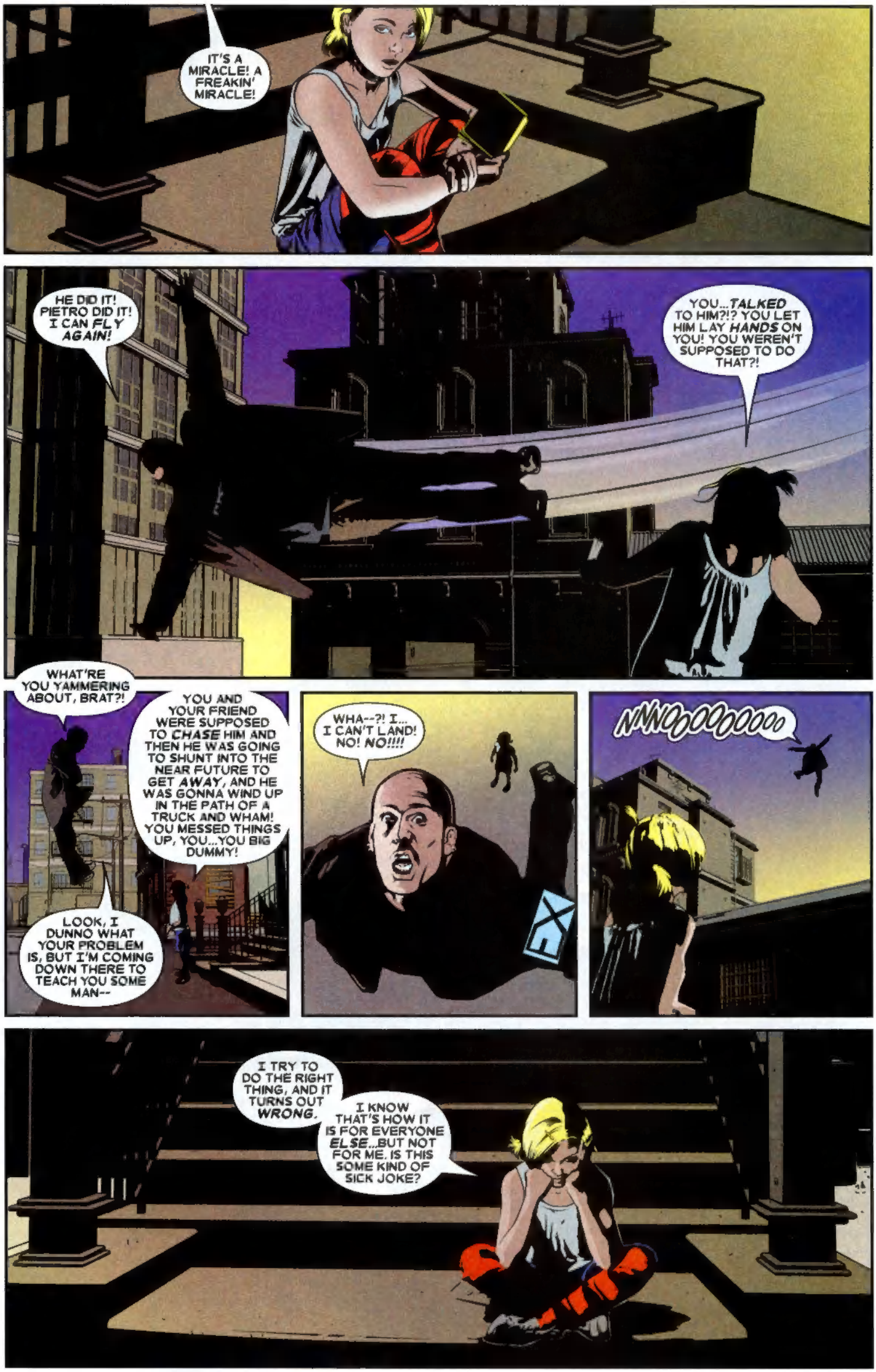
NINE ACROSS: "AN UNCOMPLICATED TWO THOUSAND POUNDS."
SIMPLETON.
HEY! YEAH! THANKS FOR THE HELP, MONET.
I WASN'T HELPING YOU, RICTOR. I WAS DESCRIBING YOU.
YOU KNOW, I NEVER THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE THAT JAMESON'S EDITORIALS COULD BE EVEN MORE OBNOXIOUS. I UNDERESTIMATED HIM.
MEANING WHAT, SIRYN?
HE'S CROWING ABOUT THIS "SUPER HERO REGISTRATION ACT." SAYING THE GOVERNMENT'S FINALLY LISTENED TO HIM. THAT THIS IS A "NECESSARY FIRST STEP."
SO?
"SO?" HAVE YOU GIVEN THOUGHT TO THE "NECESSARY *SECOND* STEP?"
NOT REALLY. I LIVE IN THE MOMENT.
THE NEXT STEP IS SHUTTING US DOWN!
THEY CALL IT "*EROSION OF FREEDOM*" FOR A REASON. IT HAPPENS SLOWLY, OVER TIME.
WHAT'S THE X-MEN'S TAKE ON THIS? THIS THING HAS ITS ROOTS IN THE MUTANT REGISTRATION ACT. SHOULDN'T WE PRESENT A UNITED FRONT, ONE WAY OR T'OTHER?
I DON'T KNOW *WHAT'S* UP WITH THE X-MEN LATELY. FOR INSTANCE, WHEN SCOTTY CAME BY THE OTHER DAY...
...HE SEEMED TO RECOGNIZE LAYLA. BUT THEN HE ACTED LIKE HE DIDN'T.
THAT'S *IT?* THAT'S *ALL* YOU'VE GOT FOR ACCUSATIONS?
MAYBE THAT'S *ENOUGH.* THAT KID... I DUNNO. COULD BE A SPY.


OH! I, UH... WAS ABOUT TO RING THE BELL.
I KNOW.
YOU SAW ME?
NO. THEY'RE INSIDE, ONE FLOOR UP, OFFICE ON THE RIGHT.

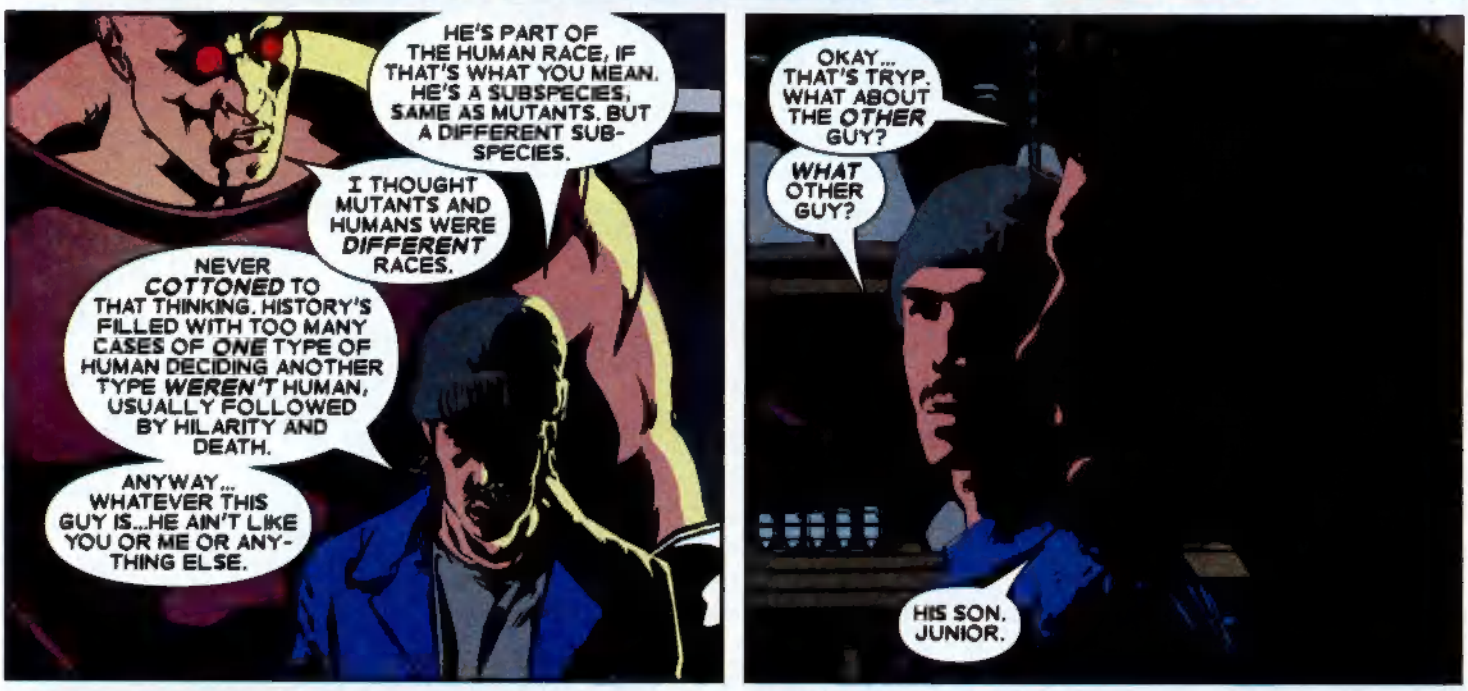
YOU'RE NOT IN MY FILES. SHOULD I KNOW YOU?
NOBODY KNOWS ME. GO ON UP.

I BET EVERYONE TELLS YOU YOU'RE AN ODD YOUNG LADY.
COULDN'T SAY. I HAVEN'T MET EVERY-ONE.

I'M SORRY.
EEEE


IT'S A MIRACLE! A FREAKIN' MIRACLE!
HE DID IT! PIETRO DID IT! I CAN *FLY* AGAIN!
YOU...*TALKED* TO HIM?!? YOU LET HIM LAY *HANDS* ON YOU! YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO DO THAT?!
WHAT'RE YOU YAMMERING ABOUT, BRAT?!
YOU AND YOUR FRIEND WERE SUPPOSED TO *CHASE* HIM AND THEN HE WAS GOING TO SHUNT INTO THE NEAR FUTURE TO GET *AWAY*, AND HE WAS GONNA WIND UP IN THE PATH OF A TRUCK AND WHAM! YOU MESSED THINGS UP, YOU...YOU BIG DUMMY!
LOOK, I DUNNO WHAT YOUR PROBLEM IS, BUT I'M COMING DOWN THERE TO TEACH YOU SOME MAN--
WHA--?! I... I CAN'T LAND! NO! *NO!!!!*
NNOOOOOOOO
I TRY TO DO THE RIGHT THING, AND IT TURNS OUT *WRONG*.
I KNOW THAT'S HOW IT IS FOR EVERYONE *ELSE*...BUT NOT FOR ME. IS THIS SOME KIND OF SICK JOKE?

HERE WE GO.
THE FOLDER'S MARKED "WEIRD."
THAT'S 'CAUSE WHAT I FOUND WAS WEIRD. THIS SAMPLE YOU BROUGHT IN...IT'S LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER SEEN.
MEANING WHAT?
MEANING IF THERE'S ANYTHING LIKE IT, I HAVEN'T SEEN IT.
THERE'S SOME TOTALLY NEW DNA MARKERS IN HERE. COMPLETELY UNCHARTED.
YOU'RE SAYING HE'S... WHAT? ALIEN?


HE'S PART OF THE HUMAN RACE, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN. HE'S A SUBSPECIES, SAME AS MUTANTS. BUT A DIFFERENT SUB-SPECIES.
I THOUGHT MUTANTS AND HUMANS WERE DIFFERENT RACES.
NEVER COTTONED TO THAT THINKING. HISTORY'S FILLED WITH TOO MANY CASES OF ONE TYPE OF HUMAN DECIDING ANOTHER TYPE WEREN'T HUMAN, USUALLY FOLLOWED BY HILARITY AND DEATH.
ANYWAY... WHATEVER THIS GUY IS...HE AIN'T LIKE YOU OR ME OR ANY-THING ELSE.
OKAY... THAT'S TRYP. WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER GUY?
WHAT OTHER GUY?
HIS SON. JUNIOR.

MADDY, I DUNNO WHAT THE HELL YOU'RE TALKIN' ABOUT.
THE TWO SAMPLES YOU GAVE ME...I JUST FIGURED YOU WERE PLAYING IT SAFE.
SAFE? I DON'T--?

THE TWO SAMPLES ARE EXACT DNA MATCHES. THEY'RE THE SAME GUY.

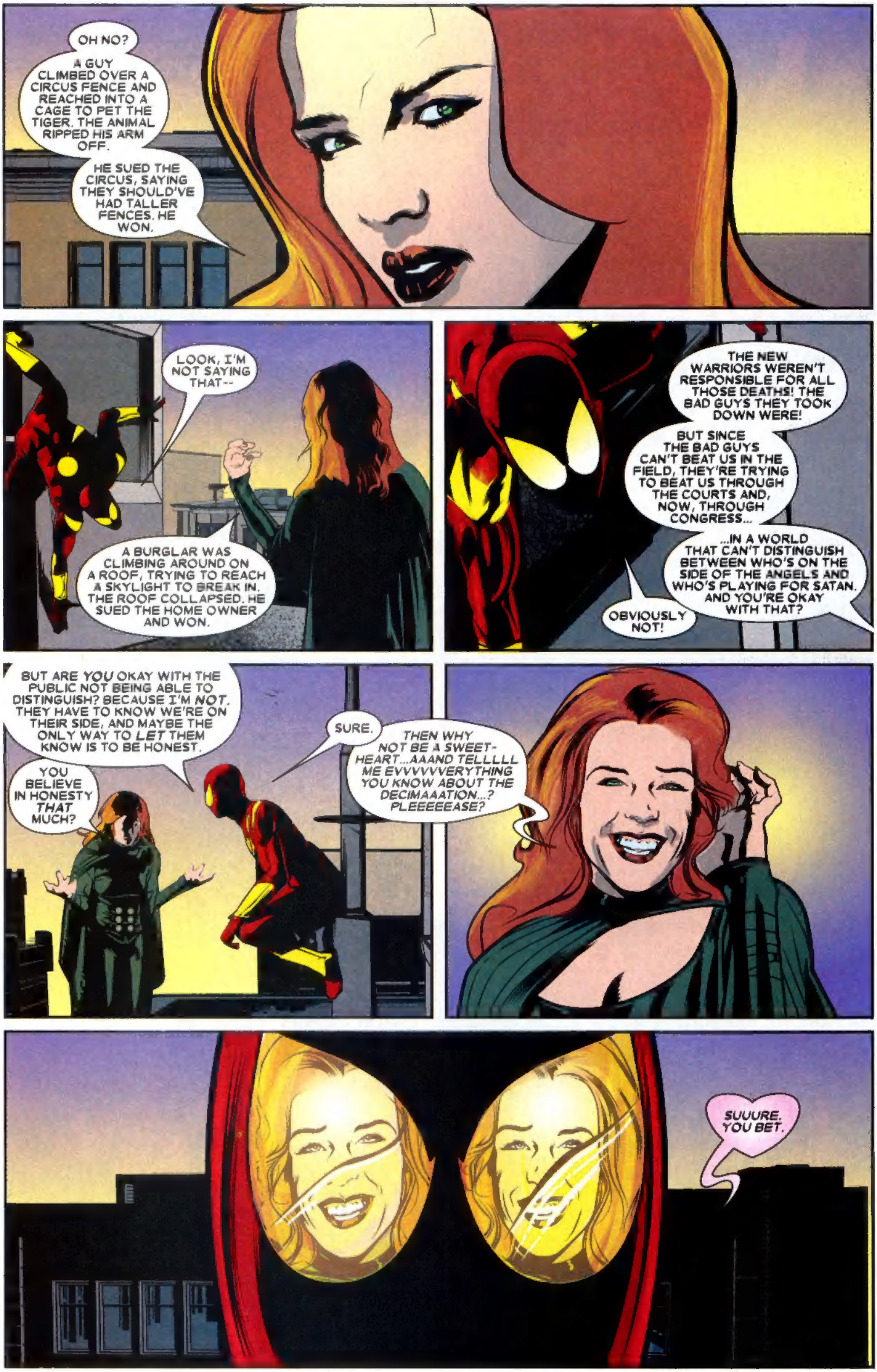
PUT IT DOWN. YOU'RE NOT GETTING AWAY...
YOU'RE THE ONE NOT GETTING AWAY! MAN, I CAN'T WAIT UNTIL ALL YOU JERKS HAVE T'COME CLEAN WITH YOUR I.D.S! THAT'LL BE SWEET!
YOU BETTER BE LIVIN' IN FREAKIN' FORT KNOX, MAN! 'CAUSE ONCE GUYS LIKE ME FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE, GUYS LIKE YOU'LL BE--
AHHHHH!!
MY HAND! MY FREAKING HAND IS BROKE!
KRAK
MATCHES YOUR JAW.
UNFFFFFF!!!

NICE WORK, SPIDER-MAN.
SAME TO YOU. GOOD AIM, SMASHING HIS GUN APART WITH THAT...WHATTAYA CALL IT?

SONIC LANCE. NOT SO GOOD AIM, ACTUALLY. I WAS GOING FOR HIS HEAD.
OH.

WELL... GOOD JOB EITHER WAY.
I HEARD WHAT HE WAS SAYING ABOUT THE REG ACT. JUST ANOTHER REASON WHY IT'S A BAD IDEA.
I DUNNO ABOUT THAT. HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE DIED BECAUSE OF THE NEW WARRIORS. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO TAKING RESPONSIBILITY?

WHAT, DID THEY GET TO YOU, TOO?
NOBODY "GOT" TO ME.

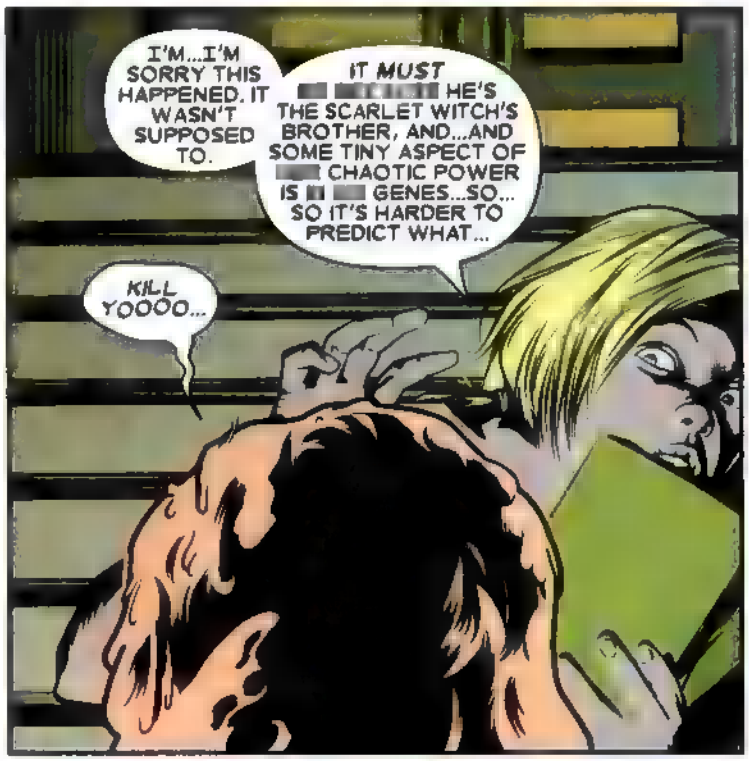

OH NO?
A GUY CLIMBED OVER A CIRCUS FENCE AND REACHED INTO A CAGE TO PET THE TIGER. THE ANIMAL RIPPED HIS ARM OFF.
HE SUED THE CIRCUS, SAYING THEY SHOULD'VE HAD TALLER FENCES. HE WON.
LOOK, I'M NOT SAYING THAT--
A BURGLAR WAS CLIMBING AROUND ON A ROOF, TRYING TO REACH A SKYLIGHT TO BREAK IN. THE ROOF COLLAPSED. HE SUED THE HOME OWNER AND WON.
THE NEW WARRIORS WEREN'T RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THOSE DEATHS! THE BAD GUYS THEY TOOK DOWN WERE!
BUT SINCE THE BAD GUYS CAN'T BEAT US IN THE FIELD, THEY'RE TRYING TO BEAT US THROUGH THE COURTS AND, NOW, THROUGH CONGRESS...
...IN A WORLD THAT CAN'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN WHO'S ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS AND WHO'S PLAYING FOR SATAN. AND YOU'RE OKAY WITH THAT?
OBVIOUSLY NOT!
BUT ARE *YOU* OKAY WITH THE PUBLIC NOT BEING ABLE TO DISTINGUISH? BECAUSE I'M *NOT*. THEY HAVE TO KNOW WE'RE ON THEIR SIDE, AND MAYBE THE ONLY WAY TO *LET* THEM KNOW IS TO BE HONEST.
YOU BELIEVE IN HONESTY *THAT* MUCH?
SURE.
THEN WHY NOT BE A SWEET-HEART...AAAND TELLLLL ME EVVVVVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT THE DECIMAAATION...? PLEEEEEASE?
SUUURE. YOU BET.

HEY, RAHNE.
HEY YUIRSELF. WHAT'RE YE DOING OUT HERE, LAYLA?
WAITING.
FOR WHAT?
I'LL KNOW WHEN IT GETS HERE.

OOOKAY.

YOURRR... FAULT...

...ALL...YOUR... FAULT...HE DID THIS...TOOOO
...
...CAAAAAUUUUSE OF YOOOO...


I'M...I'M SORRY THIS HAPPENED. IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO.
IT MUST [redacted] HE'S THE SCARLET WITCH'S BROTHER, AND...AND SOME TINY ASPECT OF [redacted] CHAOTIC POWER IS [redacted] GENES...SO... SO IT'S HARDER TO PREDICT WHAT...
KILL YOOOO...

KILLLLL... Y--

--OOOOOOOO...
GULP

EWW. GROSS.
GURGLE-GLORP

GOOD HEAVENS, YOUNG LADY, YOU LOOK SO SERIOUS, LIKE YOU HAVE THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS.
I DO.
HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THAT?

I SHRUG.

WHY IS MY VOICE IN AND OUT?! 'CAUSE YOU KEEP SCREAMING TO KEEP YOURSELF ALOFT IN BETWEEN SENTENCES, SO I KEEP PULLING THE PHONE AWAY FROM MY EAR!
IF YOU'D LAND, I WOULDN'T HAVE THIS PROBLEM.
MODERN LABS
THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM! THE PROBLEM IS THAT SCOTT LIED TO US! TO ME, TO YOU!
TO OUR BLOODY FACES!
MAYBE HE DIDN'T KNOW!
EEEEEEE
OH, HE KNEW! IF SPIDER-MAN KNEW, CYCLOPS BLEEDING KNEW!
BUT IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE! WHY WOULD CYCLOPS SAY HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW ALL THE MUTANTS LOST THEIR POWERS...
...IF HE AND THE OTHER X-MEN-- AND, MY GOD, PIETRO-- WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF IT?
IT'S A COVER-UP!
BUT WHY?
I SAY WE GO TO THE MANSION, KICK THE DOOR IN AND ASK HIM!
AND IF WOLVERINE GETS IN MY WAY, I'LL YANK HIS SKELETON OUT THIS TIME, AND I'LL PULL IT OUT THROUGH HIS ARSE!
EEEEEEEE
YOU'LL DO NO SUCH THING! MEET ME BACK AT HEADQUARTERS, NOW!
BUT--
NOW, TERRY! I'M NOT KIDDIN' AROUND!
BOY...AND HERE I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT THE PHRASE ABOUT SOMEONE "GETTING THEIR IRISH UP" WAS A CLICHÉ. THE THING IS...
...IF I WEREN'T SO BUSY TRYING TO CONTROL SIRYN, I'D PROBABLY BE HAVING THE SAME REACTION. THE WHOLE TEAM WILL.

I JUST HOPE WE DON'T RUN INTO ANY OF THEM--ESPECIALLY QUICKSILVER--UNTIL THIS THING GETS SORTED OUT.
I KNOW YOU, DON'T I?
ATN RAND
YES, QUICKSILVER. I'M YOUR NEMESIS. AND YOU'RE MINE.
YOU'RE RATHER FULL OF YOURSELF, AREN'T YOU?
I HAVE A DAUGHTER, MUCH LIKE YOU. I DID TERRIBLE THINGS TO HER... OUT OF LOVE.
JUST IMAGINE WHAT I COULD DO TO YOU OUT OF HATE...OR ANGER... OR REVENGE...
OR BOREDOM.
I'D RATHER NOT. I'D RATHER HELP THAN HURT.
HELPING IS GOOD. HURTING IS EVIL. SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO TELL THEM APART.
"EVIL" IS RELATIVE. YOU GOT IN MY WAY. TO ME...THAT MAKES YOU EVIL.
I'M NOT EVIL. I'M A VICTIM, TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING, WHATEVER THAT MAY BE.
AS AM I.
NO. YOU'RE EVIL. BUT EVIL IS IMPOTENT AND HAS NO POWER BUT THAT WHICH WE LET IT EXTORT FROM US.
THEY'RE WAITING FOR YOU.
IT WOULD BE WISE FOR YOU TO STAY OUT OF MY WAY IN THE FUTURE.
THAT WOULD BE THE RIGHT THING TO DO, YES.
WE'RE AGREED THEN...

COLLISION COURSE

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JOSE VILLARRUBIA COLOR ART
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DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER

X-FACTOR

Hey, kids. Peter David here at X-Central, and I've gotta tell you...if you think it's tough waiting an entire month to find out what's going to happen to our heroes, believe it or not, I can sympathize. Remember X-FACTOR #87? Sure you do. The famous psychiatry issue where our heroes pour out their guts to Doc Samson. Well, I just finished the script for X-FACTOR #13, in which our new generation of X-Factor goes through the exact same process, which they really need after the traumatic events of issues #10-12. I'm dying to know what you guys will think of it...but I have to wait *six months.* * sigh * Well, at least we don't have to wait any longer to hear what you thought of #6. As always, letters are edited for length, but not content.

Dear X-Folks,

I just got done with issue #6 of X-FACTOR and I'm very much awestruck. We have characters here whose motives we're not sure of, whose intentions we're not sure of, and whose end goals might either be exactly what we want or the complete opposite of it. And I'm not just talking about Layla. Those who are sick of flat, one-dimensional characters who express their exact thoughts, plans, and motivations in long soliloquies should get clued in on the depth and mystery that is X-FACTOR. I'm in for the long haul and I'm giving out gift copies to friends. Keep up the good work!

Onyx Hunter
Via E-mail

Great idea with those gift copies, Onyx. Keep spreading the word!

Dear X-FACTOR,

Rictor is gay? It seems I've been out of the loop. When did that happen?

MadCatTV2
Via E-mail

I don't know why anyone thinks he's gay. He tried to throw himself off a roof and he's still mopey about losing his powers. Does that sound like someone filled with excitement or mirthful exuberance to you? I'd say he's actually pretty bummed out.

Dear Mr. David,

Since Layla's powers are essentially the ability to harness the Butterfly Effect and since you have already used one butterfly as a symbol in issue #6, I think it would be effective artistically to expand on it. There are literally thousands of species of butterflies. They come in any color you can think of and with just about any pattern you might wish to use. So depending on what effect Layla is trying to achieve, you can put different kinds and colors of butterflies in the background, e.g. bright red when she is angry, deep blue or black if she is trying to hide from someone, white if she is trying to alter probability so someone who was going to die of sickness gets that one-in-a-million miracle cure.

Lewis Himelhoch
Orlando, FL

I'm not sure, Lewis. Sounds kind of like going overboard to me. Then again, I'm the one who lobbied for the Phoenix Effect to be a giant map of Arizona, so what do I know? What do you guys think?

Dear Peter David & Co.,

I've noticed in recent letter columns that a lot of people don't seem to like Monet. I wanted to put my two cents in and say that I love Monet.

Steve Fuson
Pleasanton, CA

Monet responds: "What a cheapskate. Two cents? You want to prove your love for me, Steeeeve, at the very least, you should be putting in a C note."

Dear Peter and, you know, others,

I think X-FACTOR is brilliantly written, especially last issue, the whole Butterfly Effect thing. But still, Jamie Madrox has got some growing up to do, and I don't think he's a really effective lead character.

Andrew J. Shaw
Via E-mail

Well, Andrew, obviously I disagree about Jamie's capacity for being a lead character, but I agree that he's got some growing up to do. And that's very much going to be happening over the next issues as Jamie confronts the hard decisions that come from being in charge, makes them...and, as a result, has some very unexpected changes in his relationships with many people, both on the team and not on the team.

Dear X-Office:

If all the mutants, especially in NYC, are being rounded up and brought to Xavier's (a la Jazz in X-MEN: 198), and the X-Men can't even go to Manhattan or Stamford without a Sentinel escort, why is it that we haven't seen a single O*N*E agent, much less a 60-foot robot, over in X-FACTOR, especially after the spectacle that Rahne and Guido made of themselves? You'd think that the NYPD would have at least notified O*N*E and prompted a visit.

Charley X, Headmaster
Mutatis Mutandis, The Online Division of the Xavier Institute

I'll give you a real answer and a comic book answer, Charley. Real answer: Because I don't see the stories in the other books any sooner than you do. There's no mechanism in place—none—to provide all the writers with all the upcoming stories and storylines. So if I keep writing stories to play catch-up and reflect developments elsewhere, X-FACTOR is going to have a perpetual five-month lag time. I deemed it necessary when it came to addressing Banshee's death (Actual conversation: "Uhm, Andy...Banshee just died. Is he really dead?" "He did!? Lemme check. (an hour passes). Yeah. He's dead." "Well, geez, Siryn should really react to that, shouldn't she?" "Yeah, that'd be good.") I don't think anybody wants that, so we'll just leave it to the hordes of No-Prize seekers to figure it out. Fake answer: It happened in between issues. There was a whole big fight and there were Sentinel guts all over the place. We don't like to talk about it.

-PAD

GUEST STARRING THE ASTONISHING X-MEN

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